

Feb'y 28. 1797

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FOUR SERMONS

Feb'y 28. 1797

ON THE

STATE-FAST AND FESTIVALS,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

By EDWARD PEARSON, B.D.

FELLOW OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.



(Price ONE SHILLING and SIXPENCE.)

2046-104

A
S E R M O N

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NOVEMBER 5, 1793.

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FELLOW OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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(Price SIX PENCE.)



2047.4

TO

THE REVEREND

WILLIAM ELLISTON, D.D.

MASTER OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE,

THIS SERMON

IS,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF RESPECT,

ESTEEM, AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIBED.

Published by the same Author.

1. An Essay on the Goodness of GOD, as manifested in the Mission of Jesus Christ; a Norrisian Prize Essay. Price 1s.
2. A Sermon preached at the Church of St. Mary at Tower, Ipswich, June 25, 1786. Price 1s.
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A

S E R M O N, &c.

PROVERBS XXIV. 21.

MY SON, FEAR THOU THE LORD, AND
THE KING; AND MEDDLE NOT WITH
THEM, THAT ARE GIVEN TO CHANGE.

IT has sometimes been questioned, whether subjects of a political nature, in which there is necessarily room for a variety of opinions, can be discussed in religious assemblies, with any useful effect. It does not appear, however, that there is any foundation for this doubt, either in the nature of the thing itself, or from what has

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been

been actually experienced. If, indeed, *erroneous* opinions on such subjects be delivered in connection with the powerful persuasions of religion, there is cause enough to apprehend, that they will be productive of extensive mischief; a consideration, which ought to awaken the caution of those, who are liable to deliver them; but there is, I believe, no ground to imagine, that the mischief, which has thus been produced, is at all to be brought in competition with the benefits, which may reasonably be expected. That religion is properly employed in *exhorting* men to the discharge of their various duties, of *whatever* kind, will readily be allowed; or, if it should be doubted with respect to political ones in particular, we have the injunction of an Apostle to cite in its defence. To the generality of men, however, such an exhortation would be addressed to no purpose, unless the duties themselves were stated
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and explained. The bulk of the people have little time or opportunity for the minute investigation of discordant obligations. They must, after all, take many things for granted; and, if they do not learn their morality from their spiritual advisers, they will be left to seek it, where the chance is much more unfavourable to its being of a salutary nature, in casual conversation.

It will not, I hope, be imagined that, in saying this, I am contending for any thing, that would render our solemn meetings the occasions of serving personal interests, or make religion the instrument of a party. I mean not to assert it as a *privilege* of the ministers of the Gospel, but as a sacred *obligation*, that they suffer not the influence they have over the minds of their hearers, in any instance to remain unemployed, from an excessive apprehension which may be en-

tertained of its abuse. The duties owing to the State, to the exercise of which almost every one, in this country, is liable to be called, are doubtless of an important nature; and there is, at least, as much danger of their being mistaken, as justifies, in other instances, the most careful preparation. Public instruction, however, on any of our duties, cannot, with propriety, do more than lay down the general principles of conduct. To apply them to particular cases, should be left to the wisdom and virtue of him, to whom they occur. For, while we are guarding against the evil of any one's deciding for himself, without proper previous instruction; we must not forget the danger he would incur in following, without examination, the opinion of another. With respect to political questions in particular, it is to be apprehended, that inexperience in public affairs, or a regard to private considerations,

siderations, may oftentimes render him unfit to be followed as a guide in action, whom yet, as a teacher, we may listen to with profit. Nothing indeed but what, when explained, is of an indisputable nature, ought to be enforced by the motives of religion; yet there will remain, under this and every just limitation, a very extensive field of useful instruction; and perhaps most of the advice, that is at all necessary to be given on political subjects, may, with propriety, be given from the pulpit. Inflaming addresses cannot be defended, because from those, whose minds are inflamed, nothing but mischief is to be expected; but, while we restrain the promoters of sedition, we should be cautious of establishing a principle, which would silence the counsellors of safety. With this impression of the utility to be derived from political discourses, I should not be deterred, by an ill-grounded prejudice,

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dice, from entering on the subjects, suggested by the return of this solemnity, were I not also authorized by the institutions of our Church, and encouraged by the most respectable examples.

I SHALL therefore endeavour, on this occasion, *first*, to shew the great danger of attempting to subvert, by violence, any established government; and, *secondly*, to vindicate the happy event of the Revolution from the objections that might be drawn from this general principle.

WHEN Solomon gave the precept, which I have selected for a text, he addressed it to a people, who were under a form of government in some respects peculiar. The laws themselves were, for the most part, the institutions of divine inspiration; and the administration of them, though not always
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so wise as in the reign of Solomon, was supposed to be directed by the more immediate influence of the Deity. Under such circumstances, opposition to the government might properly be considered as rebellion against God; and the fear of the Lord, and of the King, would be duties of the same kind and degree. At a period too when, as in the days of Solomon, "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba;—when they were many, as the sand which is by the sea, in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry," there was but little temptation to resist the authority, to which they owed their protection and plenty.

THE obligation of the precept, however, does not *entirely* depend on the particular situation of those, to whom it was addressed.

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There is a sense, and an important one, in which all governments may be justly considered as the institutions of God; and whoever opposes them in this sense, incurs the guilt of opposition to God. It is, doubtless, the design of providence that, till mankind are much more disposed, than at present, to act rightly from principles of virtue, they should be restrained from wrong, by the fear of immediate punishment; and that this punishment should, in many instances, be inflicted by the judgement of their fellow creatures. But it is not to be imagined, that the authority, by which punishment is inflicted, can be suddenly transferred, without endangering, if not destroying, the habit of submission to it. All men, and especially those who have most need of it, would willingly live free from control. Independently of revelation, it is only a sense of the evils which would result, were
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every man to do "what is right in his own eyes," that can manifest the will of God, in this matter, or furnish an inducement to obey it; and we know, from experience, that, in a *numerous* body of men, these evils may be a long time endured, before the effect to be desired from them is produced. When the habit of submission is once broke through, it will not be easily renewed, though founded in reason; but the difficulty will be exceedingly increased if, as is the case in the bulk of mankind, it be chiefly the effect of imitation and custom.

It is not, indeed, to be denied, that one form of government is better than another; and that men may, not only innocently, but laudably, be employed, in endeavouring to bring about the best. Let it be remembered, however, that, in an *abstract* sense, there is no such thing, as a perfect form.

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The superiority of one above another must be determined by its suitability to the circumstances of those, for whom it is intended. That which, from habits and prejudices already formed, is most likely to be best administered, is the best for the present; though there is no reason that it should preclude, as circumstances alter, the gradual introduction of another. Even despotism, which will easily be thought the least capable of defence, ought not to be irrelatively condemned. In some circumstances, it may be the best form possible. All human beings, for no inconsiderable portion of their existence, are necessarily under absolute control; and, in many instances, it must be acknowledged, the longer this species of rule is continued, the greater is the happiness produced. There is also a period of civilization, in which *societies* must be composed of individuals who, for the most part, are
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in a state of intellectual childhood; and in which, therefore, they cannot be so happy, as when directed by the will of the more improved few, or, it may be, of one. Were all the members of a community equal in wisdom and virtue, it would, perhaps, be a *plausible* objection to any form of government proposed to be established in it, that each had not an equal share in its formation, and an equal chance of participating in its administration. But, surely, no reasoning can be necessary to expose the futility of schemes, which proceed on a supposition so unlikely to be realized. It is, indeed, our duty, by instructing the ignorant, and admonishing the depraved, to render this more and more *like* truth; but, till it be accomplished, we shall do well to consider the danger of acting as if it were so; lest we find, when it is, perhaps, too late, that, while we

aimed at the good of the community, we were undermining its security, and arming folly and wickedness with the weapons of destruction.

BUT, whatever opinions may be entertained, respecting the form of government to be preferred, we may venture to lay it down as a maxim, with respect to the *manner* of introducing it, that, unless indeed where insupportable tyranny prevails, it ought not to be attempted, by offering violence to the existing legislative authority. Since no government is so bad, as not to be far better than anarchy, it should be the part of him, who engages in designs, which may eventually overturn an existing form, to consider well, what it is, in fact, that he shall be able to substitute in its stead. The " sudden calamity," which is predicted, in the verse subsequent to the text,

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as the sure consequence of such designs, has been too often and too fatally experienced. The atrocious attempt, which, by the gracious interposition of Heaven in its defeat, has contributed to make this day a "day of joy and gladness" to us, would doubtless, if suffered to take place, have been, at that time, destructive of the public security, and now the subject of lamentation. And, with respect to the present situation of a neighbouring country, though I would not indiscriminately censure all that has been done, much less condemn the intention of the doers, yet I cannot help regarding it as a fresh instance of the truth of the same prediction. That something was materially wrong, even in the early stages of that mournful business, the events, which have followed, will justify the most cautious in concluding. "They have," to use the words of an Historian on another
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occasion, “ they have, in many instances, by propagating fictions, by promoting violence, and by lessening the reverence of what had ever been esteemed sacred, served to corrupt, as well as to infatuate, the people, to whom they made a tender of liberty and justice.” They have done no better, at the best, than perpetrate evil, that good might come; a conduct, which, in the judgement of an Apostle, is worthy of condemnation; and for which, therefore, whatever advantages may eventually arise from it, nothing but punishment can be expected by the immediate agents.

WITH such an instance before us, we shall not perform our part, a useful though an humble one, if we neglect to derive, from the misconduct and misery displayed in it, a lesson of prudence to ourselves. In this country, we have already, in the opinion
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of those best able to judge, all for which the French can be justified in contending. But, be this as it may, there is certainly nothing, that we can reasonably wish for, which would compensate for the hazard of such a contention, as they have been the occasion to provoke. And if, as is generally the case in civil contentions; if, by a retrogradation in politics, authority, changing from hand to hand, should arrive where the physical strength is the greatest, and the wisdom to direct it the least, there will be just cause to apprehend, that we shall return, in the end, to the predatory state of independent and uncivilized life; or, if we survive as a nation, be rescued from the miseries of anarchy, at the loss of even salutary freedom. In his proper station, and according to his knowledge, let every one contribute his endeavours to advance the comforts, and to increase the security of

social

social life. He may doubtless find opportunities enough, when his zeal will be employed with almost a certainty of success. But let no one, in aiming at ideal perfection in forms of government, or even attainable improvements, be induced, by the mere probability of distant good, to countenance measures, which are immediately and clearly detrimental. He, who is actually oppressed, will struggle to be free, and may have his excuse for doing so; but let us not, in the officiousness of charity, be too hasty in removing what, perhaps, we only *imagine* to be the oppressions of others. Let him, who would be praised for his perspicacity in the discovery of imperfections, recollect, that the knowledge of evil is not, for its own sake, desirable; and that he, who awakens others to the sense of ills, they would not otherwise have felt, without providing also a suitable remedy

medy, cannot justly be reckoned among the benefactors of mankind.

I PROCEED, in the *second* place, to obviate the objection, which might seem to arise, from the principles laid down, against the event of our own Revolution.

I AM aware of the imperfection, which, whether necessarily or not, is generally intermixed in every work of man; and, though the Revolution was, on the whole, so conducted, as to merit our commendation, no less than our gratitude; yet, to vindicate it in every particular, I should think a presumptuous undertaking. It is possible, that, as we have been told, "some of those concerned in it, were not altogether justifiable in the means they employed; and that, in some instances, more regard was paid to political, than to moral con-

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siderations."

siderations." But, in whatever respects they might be deserving of blame, they were not deficient in their endeavours to preserve, among the people, the habit of obedience to existing laws; nor did they, in any instance, so act, as to evince themselves *lovers of change*.

SOME have been misled, by the similarity of appellations, to consider that event as similar, in its *nature*, to what has been attempted in France. We shall find, however, on the slightest comparison, that they are scarce less different in the *object*, than in the means made use of to accomplish it. In the one case, opposition was not made to the *legislative*, but merely to the *executive* authority. In the other, the legislative authority itself has not only been controlled, but entirely subverted and destroyed. In the one, no classes of men, I
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had almost said no individuals, were deprived of rights, which they held by existing laws; and certainly none were so punished, as in the other, in consequence of *ideal* crimes, but in virtue of a judgement, provided by the law, or dictated by necessity, for the abuse of public confidence. No deviation from long established habits and prejudices was forced upon the people; nor was their obedience to be obtained, at the expence of every valuable affection. On the contrary, it was the real, as well as the professed object of resistance, to restore things to the point, from which they had been perverted; and to provide that, in future, the executive part of the government should be, as was intended, the faithful dispenser of the law. We know that, on many occasions, as is set forth in the *Declaration of Rights*, " things had been done by the King, in his individual capacity, which were

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directly

directly contrary to the laws and statutes and freedom of the realm;" and that, by assuming a power, which was not legally invested in him, " he endeavoured to subvert and extirpate the protestant religion." But, in the management of governments, to *reflore* and to *make new*, are attempts of so different a nature, that, from the success of one, but little judgment can be formed of the expediency of the other.

THAT some reformation was desirable in the government of France, no one among us, who has a proper sense of the blessings we are this day commemorating, will hesitate to admit. But we must conclude, from the result, that what was desirable was not, in this case, expedient; or, that the design of accomplishing it was extremely ill-concerted. The benefits of the best form of government possible, should they at length

length be obtained, will not, in the lapse of ages, compensate for the miseries, of which the struggle for them has been the occasion. In truth, setting aside the considerations of justice, there was reason enough to apprehend the failure of a plan, which aimed at so much. Individuals may be susceptible of instantaneous conviction, and be persuaded, by reason or caprice, to pass suddenly, in their sentiments and conduct, from one extreme to another: but it ought not to have been supposed, that a great nation could be brought, any otherwise than by gradual changes, to pass from the lowest to the highest degree of political freedom.

THE obvious use to be made of such reflections as these is, that each of us, instead of an useless, if not pernicious interference in matters, which are not properly

perly the subjects of his cognizance, and affording encouragement to those who are "given to change," make use of the power, which, from his station in society, he has legally and regularly in his hands, to augment the blessings of our constitution, and, if any such there be, to mitigate the pressure of its evils. If, in almost any form of government, this were conscientiously performed, there would be little occasion for measures of violence. I know, and lament, the distresses of poverty; and ardently do I wish, that a comfortable subsistence were the constant reward of honest industry: but I do not conceive, that this is possible to be effected, by any form of government, independently of the justice and charity of individuals in their private stations. In a country, where provision was particularly made against the prevalence of a too great inequality, it was yet foretold, that "the
poor

poor should never cease out of it." And it is, doubtless, the wise intention of Providence, that, by the wants of some, and the abundance of others, the virtues of patience and gratitude on the one hand, and of pity and generosity on the other, should be perpetually exercised and improved. Let us, therefore, direct our attention where, if there be not a certainty of our doing good, there is, at least, no evident danger of our doing harm. Let us not be induced, by the invitations of enterprising men, to engage, at the expence of any known obligation, in what is of so uncertain termination, as theoretical schemes of reform. In the pursuit of a phantom, which will, perhaps, never be overtaken, and which, if overtaken, might elude our grasp, they may lead us from maze to maze, till, involved in inextricable difficulties, we find it scarce possible to retreat, though our advance must be marked with blood. Let

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us, after all, recollect, that human happiness does not entirely depend on forms of government. It must arise, in a considerable measure, from performances, over which external laws have but little control. And, of temporal happiness, whatever provision may be made for its security and increase, we may easily expect too great a share. He, who conceives that, under any circumstances, it can be perfect and complete, is sure to meet with disappointment. He will never be contented with present enjoyments, who does not aspire after future: and he alone, who, taking the whole of his existence into the account, knows how to estimate things at their real value; he alone is prepared to derive, from any imaginable situation, all the possible advantages, as well to bear patiently its unavoidable evils.

Now, to God, &c.



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JANUARY 30, 1794.

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A
S E R M O N, &c.

I KINGS xii. 19.

SO ISRAEL REBELLED AGAINST THE HOUSE
OF DAVID.

THE duty of obedience to civil government is so evident from reason, and so expressly enjoined by Scripture, that no one, who wishes to act in conformity with either, will pretend to dispute its obligation. With respect, however, to the *extent* of the duty, even the best disposed may entertain doubts, which can be determined only by referring to first principles. Where

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duties are of a reciprocal nature, it is necessary, that their limits should be marked out, not only that each party may be acquainted with his own, but that he may not make unreasonable demands on the other; and, though it may be sufficient, in general, to state the duties of subjects, on the supposition that rulers perform theirs, yet it is useful, on some occasions, to consider the path to be pursued by those, who suppose themselves oppressed.

It has, indeed, been said, that, to secure the quiet of a nation, the belief of the lawfulness of resistance to civil authority should have place, only in the minds of those, with whom authority is entrusted *. But
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* "He (Colville) said, the question about resistance had often been put to him, and he had always declined to answer it. But to him (Lord Middleton) he plainly said, he wished that kings and their ministers would believe

as, in general, from principles which are false, no lasting good can arise; so, in this case, it is not to be expected; that men will long admit, without satisfactory reasons, what they have a perpetual temptation to reject. The duties of magistrates and of subjects, like all others, have limits, beyond which, performance ceases to be virtue; and it would be uncharitable to suppose, that ignorance of these has not had a considerable share in producing the many revolutions, which the governments of nations have undergone, and which humanity has so much reason to lament. Revolutions have, indeed, been so frequent, that by him, who judges of the future from the past, they may, in spite of every precaution, be
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believe it lawful, and so govern as men that expect to be resisted; but he wished, that all their subjects would believe it to be unlawful, and so the world would be at quiet."

Bp. Burnet's Hist. of his own Time.

apprehended to recur. Like storms and tempests in the natural world, they may, at first sight, seem necessary to the dispersion of evils, which would otherwise be more extensively, though more silently destructive. Let us not, however, be discouraged, by such hasty deductions, from doing what may be in our power, and what therefore is our duty. The entire prevention of such disastrous events though difficult, may not be impossible; and, in any case, they may, by proper care, be rendered less sanguinary, and their recurrence less frequent. As there are few governments so radically wrong, as not to be capable of *gradual amendment*; so, few attempts will be made to subvert any, which may not, by prudent measures, be defeated. There have been instances, in which, when rebellion seemed ready to rush forth, the voice of wisdom either appeased his fury, or foiled his

his exertions. Were the machinations of every Catiline encountered by the vigilance of a Cicero, even the exigencies of dissipation, or the restlessness of ambition, though they might still be productive of partial mischiefs, would not be so effectual, as they often have been, in dissolving all the bonds of social life. And if, as cannot be denied, resistance has sometimes arisen from causes, on which reason has more influence than on these, there is good ground to hope, that a previous knowledge of their tendency will go far towards preventing their existence.

IF the end of civil government be the happiness of the people, it will, I think, follow, that the principles, from which the duties both of the ruler and the subject arise, may justly be conceived to be a contract between them, of which protection and obedience are the mutual conditions :

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at least, no objection can be made to the supposition, on the pretence, that it is too favourable to the claims of the people; for it is impossible that, what is the *end* of the institution, can be too much attended to, in the inquiry concerning the means. It must not, however, be denied, that the idea of supposing the duty of obedience to be founded on a contract, has appeared deserving of reprobation, not only because it favoured encroachments in the people, but also because, by the distinction, which it is supposed to establish, between changeable and unchangeable laws, it involves a principle, unfavourable to improvements in policy *. Yet does this consequence also result, not from the supposition of a contract, but of a contract loaded with conditions, which, as they are not essential to the
idea,

* See Mr. Paley's Moral and Political Philosophy, Book vi. Chap. 3.

idea, ought not to be alledged in opposition to its usefulness. It is not necessary to suppose, that the terms of the contract went farther, than a promise of protection on the part of the magistrate, and of obedience on that of the subject. From this supposition, if I mistake not, only salutary conclusions can be drawn. For, as rulers, with all conceivable imperfections of judgment, must ever be far more a "terror to evil, than to good works," they cannot, on this ground, be justly resisted, but on the evidence of bad intentions*; and, with respect to improvements, it will not only be their privilege, but their duty, to make such regulations, as they judge to be of general advantage, with whatever preceding ones they may chance to interfere.

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* It is to be observed, that I am here speaking of the *legislative* authority.

IT follows from this, that though, on the supposition of a contract, resistance to the legislature is not altogether unjustifiable; yet the cases must be extremely rare, in which it can be defended. For it is farther to be observed, that as, in the making of a contract, the consent of a majority of the people is necessary to its confirmation; so a question, which respects the annulling of it, can justly be determined only by a majority. On any principles, which have been maintained by a show of reasoning, resistance to the legislature can be justified, only when it evidently appears, that the majority of the people concur in the opinion, that it *ought* to be made; but, if what has now been said be just, it cannot, on the principles of morality, be justified, unless, in the judgment of that majority, the legislative authority has been exerted otherwise than for the good of the people, the purpose

pose, for which it was originally conferred. In other words; while the legislature acts for the public good, the people have no right, on the plea of expedience, to resist its authority, though it should appear to the majority, that a different form of government would be better*. It is only in the case, when the legislature, in the declared judgement of the majority, has departed from the character of a protector, and assumed that of the tyrant and oppressor, that it can justly be opposed.

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* I do not mean to say, that the people *never* have a right to attempt an alteration in the form of the legislature. If it be asked, *when* they have that right? I answer, at a *general election*. An *express* compact may have any conditions, to which the parties can agree. They have also a right, at *any* time, to declare their *sentiments* on this, as well as on other subjects, both by *petitions* to the legislature, and by *instructions* to their particular representatives. How far, in the present state of representation, a member of the legislature is bound to follow such instructions, partial indications as they must be of the public opinion, I do not now inquire.

THE case of resistance to the *executive* branch of government, though a different question, will now be of easy decision. While the supreme magistrate and his ministers govern according to the laws, resistance to them, is the same as resistance to the legislature. When they do *not*, obedience is a duty on no other ground, than that of immediate utility. If, indeed, the encroachments are such, as involve no consequences of importance to the general welfare, individuals ought to bear much, rather than hazard an interruption of the public peace, or the lessening of that reverence in others, which is so necessary to their ready obedience. But, if they are such as materially affect the interests of the community, and are so extensively felt and acknowledged, as to afford the probability of a decided superiority, resistance is then as much a duty, as submission is in general. Of this,

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in the proceedings of our happy revolution, an instance was exhibited, deserving the admiration of ages. The supreme magistrate had, by the most indubitable signs, evinced a determination to govern, not by the laws, but by his own will; and, though he might possibly have in view only the good of his subjects; yet, as he was not the appointed judge of that good, and the majority of the people were unwilling that he should be so, his encroachments on the legislative authority were legally and very justly opposed.

THE result, then, is this: while the legislative authority is exerted only for the good of the people, of which nothing less than the majority of them can properly be the judges, it cannot be resisted, without the crime of rebellion; and, while the subject refuses obedience to nothing, but what is

not required by the legislature, he cannot be punished for disobedience, but by the hand of tyranny. It is, perhaps, impossible to lay down rules, by which, in every case, the due exertions of power can be distinguished from tyranny, and justifiable resistance from rebellion. It may, however, be of some use to conscientious persons, especially in times like the present, to keep before their eyes a criterion, by which they may be guarded from very gross delusions.

BUT, however exactly the limits of obedience to the legislative and executive parts of government may be marked out, doubts may still arise respecting *where* the legislative authority is placed. When opposition was first made to the Prince, whose murder is the occasion of this day's humiliation, it was not doubted, that implicit obedience was due to the legislative authority; it was
not

not doubted, that obedience was due to the Prince, so long as he was the minister of the legislature ; but it was doubted, whether Charles, under the notion of exercising his prerogative, had not gone beyond the bounds of his lawful authority. It was, indeed, a question, about which men, who were both wise and virtuous, might have contrary opinions. Whenever, therefore, we contemplate the series of events, of which the one we are now deploring, formed the sad catastrophe, let us beware of being led into uncharitable reflexions. While we reprobate the measures, which brought a pious and benevolent monarch to the block, we are not constrained to sanction principles which would leave the conduct of a Hambden, and even of a Falkland without excuse *.

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* “ Men of the most moderate tempers, and the most attached to the church and monarchy, exerted themselves with the utmost vigour in the redress of grievances, and

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It was the infelicity of the times, that it was not then clearly ascertained, to *whom*, in many cases, the right of legislation properly belonged; and it is easy to conceive, that, in a dissention between the parts of the legislative body, persons of the most upright intentions might enlist themselves on either side.

WE are happily relieved from this uncertainty. There can now be no doubt, where the legislative authority is constitutionally lodged. It was, indeed, even at the period of the revolution, so clear to the people in general, that they rose, as with one mind, to resist the encroachments, which were attempted; and that event, we may hope, gave a lesson to our Princes, which will not
soon

in prosecuting the authors of them. In this list of patriot-royalists are found the virtuous names of Hyde and Falkland." HUME.

soon be forgotten. Hence we may derive a pleasing assurance of our safety. While a virtuous King is on the throne, a revolution can scarcely be attempted, without the crime of rebellion. Into whatever acts of indiscretion, therefore, a few individuals may be drawn, it is not likely, that any impressions, which need occasion serious alarm, can be made on the bulk of the people.

BUT though, from the heinousness of its nature, men are greatly abhorrent from the crime of rebellion, yet it is not an *impossible* one. Let us, therefore, as a farther security against its commission, consider how the temptations to it may most effectually be removed.

WE may reasonably suppose it to be the intention of the people, in every stage of
their

their existence in society, that a power should *somewhere* be placed, for prescribing such rules of conduct, as may best promote the public good; and that these, when prescribed, should be religiously observed: but we cannot, any otherwise, than by attending to the progress of civilization, determine with *whom*, at any particular period, they would place that power, were it possible to consult them. This makes it the duty of rulers, as they would preserve the peace of their country, to watch diligently the ever-varying temper of the times, and to concede, with a liberal though not a lavish hand, such portions of their authority, as can no longer be retained with advantage to the state. A father, during the infancy of his children, finds it necessary, in order to their safety, to exercise over them an authority, which is despotism itself; but, in proportion as they advance in the use of
their

their understandings, he slackens the reins of restraint; and, when the capacity of self-government is supposed to be attained, he imposes his authority no more. In like manner, in the infant state of society, while the members of it, eager in the pursuit of selfish gratifications, are most apt to interfere with the rights of others, there is need, perhaps, of the strong hand of despotic power to curb their tendency to mutual injury. As they advance, however, in moral improvement, and become more mindful of the interests of others, it seems reasonable, that the constituting of the legislative authority should be, more and more, the work of the people; and, if the time should, at length, arrive, when all are disposed to pay that regard to the happiness of their neighbour, which is due, restraints from injury being no longer necessary, each individual may safely be permitted, in most things, to legislate for himself.

IN the portion of sacred history, to which I have invited your attention in the text, there is no one, however he may condemn the consequent proceedings of the people, who will not acknowledge, that the conduct of Rehoboam was reprehensible. He ought to have considered, that, in proportion as a long reign of prosperity and peace had afforded to the people opportunities of improvement, it had incited aspirations after liberty, and increased their impatience under arbitrary restrictions. But, when we advert to the character of his counsellors, we need not wonder at his decisions. In listening to the advice of those, who, from their inexperience, were unable to discover a truth, which depended so much on observation, and indisposed, by their habits, to declare it, if unwelcome, he sufficiently manifested, that he was a fit instrument for accomplishing, what providence had ordained *,

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* 1 Kings xii. 15.

the dismemberment of his kingdom. And, though I would not represent the cases of Charles and Rehoboam as perfectly parallel, there is, it must be admitted, a resemblance between them, which cannot but be remarked. Had due allowance been made for the diffusion of political knowledge, which the rapid progress in literature and civilization, during the reigns of Elizabeth and James had occasioned, it would doubtless have been seen, that, as the people were become competent, so they had a reasonable claim, to a more extended share in the formation of the laws, by which their conduct was to be regulated. It would not have happened, that a Prince, truly desirous of the welfare of his subjects, so fatally failed of accomplishing his purpose. He would not, by too strict an adherence to precedents, have provoked an opposition, which, though extended, in the event, to rebellion,

was not, at its commencement, indefensible; or, having provoked it, would not have omitted to learn, from so plain an indication of the temper of the times, the expedience of conceding to the people those rights, which they afterwards so dearly purchased.

ON the other hand, it is to be remembered, that the faults and mistakes of rulers will neither excuse those of their subjects, nor alleviate the miseries, which must necessarily result from them. They who, in their zeal for freedom, revolt from a Rehoboam, or a Charles, will make no envious exchange, by subjecting themselves to a Jeroboam or a Cromwell. Rehoboam, indeed, by the haughtiness of his demeanour, had offended his people, and given them some grounds of apprehension; but his rebellious successor in authority, by the influence of a wicked

wicked example, proved the cause of their destruction. " Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam, which he did; they departed not from them; until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets."

And, though the subjects of Charles had reason to believe, that their liberties were not sufficiently secure, and might eventually be wrested from them; yet their oppressions were chiefly in idea: but, no sooner had they let loose the demon of rebellion, than evils, far worse than those they had apprehended, fast multiplied around them; and, while they sought to shun the possible dangers of despotism, they placed themselves beneath the uplifted rod of a tyrant. It is, therefore, the part of the patriot, as he would prove himself worthy of his name,

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to take care, not only that the end, at which he aims, be good, but that the means, by which it is to be attempted, be just, and likely to be subservient to his purpose. He, who is disposed to pay due attention to consequences, will rather leave a scheme of probable utility unaccomplished, than call to his assistance a power, which he is unable to control. When the popular tide sets strong in any direction, there is just cause to apprehend, that it will proceed beyond the bounds, which true policy would prescribe; and, though it may be the wisdom of those in authority, to disarm attempts at undue encroachment, by compliance with reasonable demands; yet it is the duty of individuals, in their private characters, to take a bias towards the contrary side. The same end would thus be promoted by both. The waves, which would be rendered more boisterous, by the resistance of the object assailed,

affailed, will be stilled into serenity, by an opposition, which originated among themselves. Even where the causes of complaint are just, yet, when complaints are in fashion, the true patriot will act more consistently with his professions, to check them for a season, rather than, by adding his respectable sanction to what has a natural tendency to excess, risk the hazard of inflaming discontents, and of finding, at last, to his surprize, "that the authority, which was sufficient to excite to insurrection, is too weak to restrain the enormities, with which it is attended *."

BUT we are not to expect, that the duties of either party will be observed, without considerable failures. Each, therefore, should be prepared to make that allowance, for which both, by turns, will have occasion. It is, in general, a source of much dissatisfaction,

* Hume.

faction, which can be avoided only by correcting our expectations, to demand a complete discharge of duty in others, while we attain to but an imperfect one in ourselves. Generosity is the acknowledged duty of the rich. The poor, therefore, are too apt to imagine, that a rich man, if, in any instance, he is deficient in generosity, has no claim on their gratitude, how much soever, on the whole, they may have been the objects of his bounty; and it is well, if they think he has fulfilled his duty, in this respect, while he has any thing left to bestow. Gratitude, on the other hand, is the duty of the poor. The rich, therefore, are too apt to think, that a poor man is seldom so thankful as he ought to be; and, if any sentiment should appear, which is inconsistent with their idea of his obligations, he is quickly regarded as unworthy of their bounty. Neither party seems sufficiently to
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sider the difference, between conceiving the idea of a duty, and actually discharging it. There may be difficulties in the discharge, for which it is not easy to make just allowance. The rich man has perpetual struggles, felt only by himself, between the sense of his obligation to perform his duty, by relieving the indigent, and the desire to be distinguished in his class, by the increase of his possessions: and the poor man has fears, of which the rich can have no adequate idea, lest, while he is acknowledging the bounty of his benefactor, he may confess his dependence on another, which will degrade him from the character of a man. In the discharge of political duties, there is, at least, as much need of this allowance, as in that of any others. Let, then, each party, in judging the proceedings of the other, be directed by the candour, which the difficulty of the situation, or the im-

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portance,

portance of the matter at stake, may justly claim. Though there should be a too great tenaciousness of prerogative, yet let it be remembered, that it may arise from apprehensions, not altogether unfounded, that easiness of concession will invite unreasonable demands: and, though the people may be too clamorous in the cause of liberty, yet it should never be forgotten, that, what has been obtained by the blood of their ancestors, can scarce be too highly valued, or too anxiously preserved.

ABOVE all, since it is of more consequence to secure the performance of duties, than to detect the delinquents, who have neglected them, it is incumbent on every one, to be chiefly attentive to the discharge of his own. With this view, rather than with that of increasing the ability to find fault, let the subject of this day's solemnity

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be considered. There are few, who may not find in it reasons both of thankfulness and caution. As, from what was right in the conduct of each party, we derive many advantages of our present state; so, from the errors of each, we may learn a lesson of wisdom. While rulers contemplate with grateful respect, the fortitude, with which opposition, even unto blood, was so heroically made against encroachments, incompatible with the effectual exertion of authority; they should be awakened, by the melancholy issue, to a sense of the danger in too long persisting to refuse concessions, which may be reasonable and necessary. While subjects admire, and are thankful for, the patriotism of a Hambden, in his stand against overstretched authority; they should be aware, that, like him, they may easily be led, by the accession of principles less pure, to oppose with intemperance,

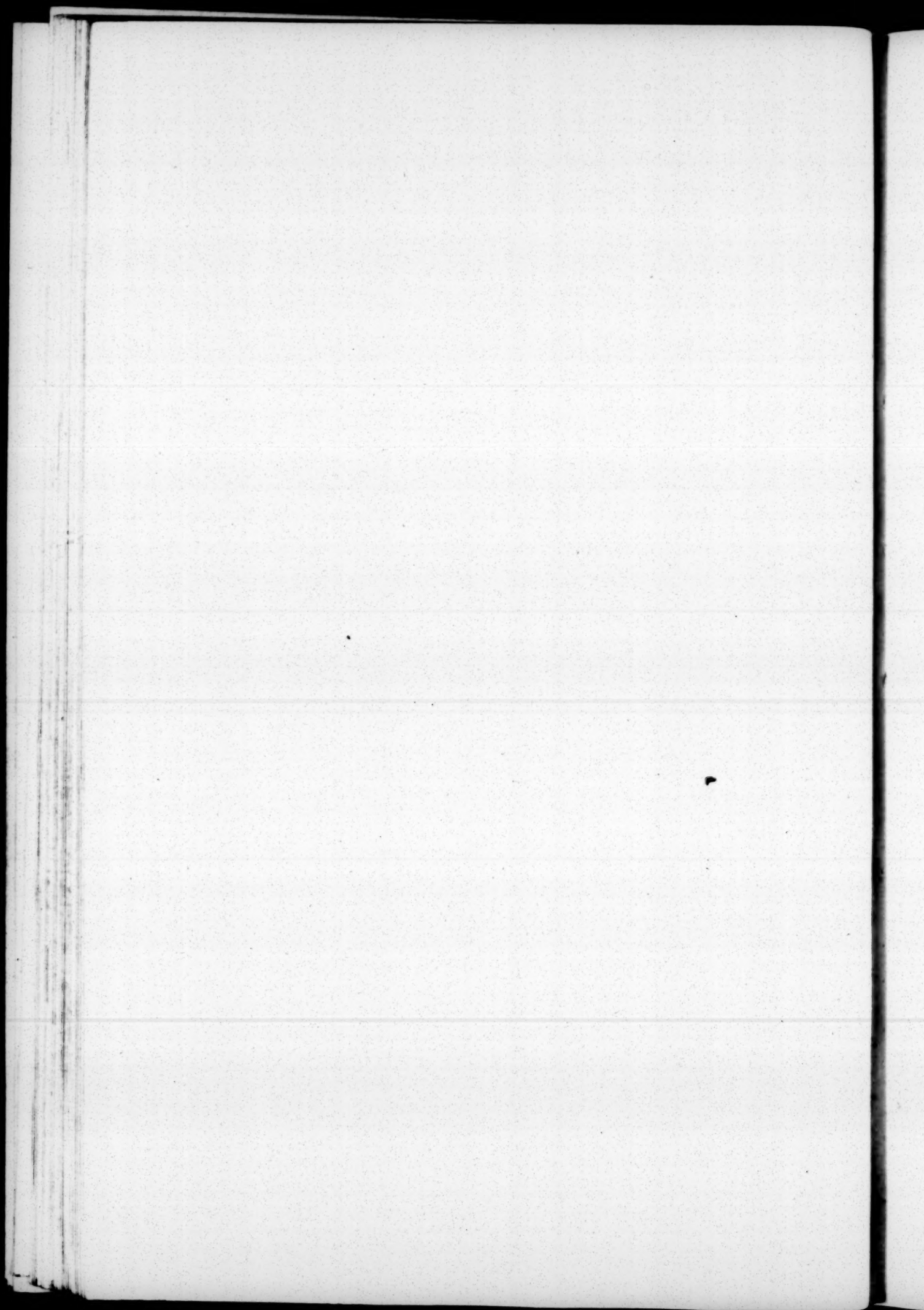
and, at length, become the instruments of ambition, contribute to overthrow, what they set out with an intention to defend.

If the principles, which I have stated, be just, we may draw from them the comfortable conclusion, that, in the defence of our present constitution, notwithstanding any imperfections, which may possibly exist in it, the co-operation of the wise and good may reasonably be expected. For, whoever considers it with candour and discernment, must acknowledge, that, on those principles, no opposition to it can be justified. It will not by any be denied, that we are governed by laws, which are admirably adapted to promote the public good. In all material instances, they are administered with an even and equal hand ; so that our courts of judicature, in the accuracy of their inquiries, and the uprightness of their decisions,

cisions, are the wonder and envy of the world. And though, from the mode, in which the legislative body is constituted, there is not, perhaps, all the security we might wish, nor probably all which, at a proper season, we shall obtain, that none but beneficial laws will be made hereafter; yet, in fact, there is but little room for apprehension: our legislature is, indeed, neither infallible nor impeccable, but it is not very likely, that any one, *however* constituted, would possess a share materially greater, either of wisdom or integrity.

Now, to God, &c.





A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

MAY 29, 1795.

BY EDWARD PEARSON, B.D.

FELLOW OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.



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TO
THE REVEREND
JOHN HEY, D.D.

LATE NORRISIAN PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

THIS SERMON

IS,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF RESPECT,

ESTEEM, AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIBED.

Lately published, by the same Author,

1. A Sermon preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge, Nov. 5, 1793, Price 6d.

2. A Sermon preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge, Jan. 30, 1594, Price 6d.

A
S E R M O N, &c.

I CORINTH. iii. 2.

I HAVE FED YOU WITH MILK, AND NOT
WITH MEAT; FOR HITHERTO YE WERE
NOT ABLE TO BEAR IT, NEITHER YET
NOW ARE YE ABLE.

I N these words, we have a striking instance of that prudence in the propagation of truth, which is necessary to its being productive of beneficial effects. The apostle, instructed by the revelation of Jesus Christ, could entertain no doubts about

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the truth of the doctrines, which he was commissioned to preach ; yet, remembering the end of them to be the happiness of those, to whom he should preach them, he saw reason, in order to the attainment of that end, for the exercise of caution in his *mode* of doing it. In this, indeed, he did but follow the example of his divine instructor. Jesus himself, though he doubtless was desirous, that the multitude, to whom he addressed his discourses, had they been able to bear it, should *immediately* have understood the nature of his religion, yet thought it necessary, by speaking to them in parables, of which they did not, at the time, comprehend the full meaning, *gradually* to unfold to them truths, against the abrupt admission of which, their prejudices might have been an insuperable bar; or which, if they had been too suddenly adopted, might have led them to extravagancies of conduct, in-

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consistent with their safety, and eventually prejudicial to the progress of the gospel. To his disciples, it is true, he privately expounded *many* things, which were spoken to others in parables; but yet, even to these, he did not, during the whole time of his abode with them, explain to them *all* things. It was not long before his final departure from them, that he declared, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." And it was not 'till the descent of the spirit of truth, that the apostles themselves fully understood the religion, they were appointed to preach.

IF we look back to the Patriarchal and Jewish institutions, the caution, which was observed in unfolding the several parts of the *same* dispensation, may be traced also in the nature of the *different* dispensations; if, indeed, they may properly be considered as

different. The religion of the Patriarchs, or of the Jews, was by no means such, as was adapted to raise human nature to that perfection, of which it is capable; yet each was probably the best, that men were then prepared to receive. Many things were tolerated in the Patriarchs, which morality condemns: and, though the law of Moses allowed less deviation from right conduct, yet, even in this, for the hardness of their hearts, some indulgencies were permitted to the people, which nothing but the plea of expedience could excuse. Accordingly, it was afterward professed, that "the Jewish law was only a school-master to bring men unto Christ." For some part of its duration, it seemed to aim at little more, than to preserve the people from the grossness of idolatry. Prophets indeed among the Jews, as Philosophers also among the Heathens, arose, from time to time, who explained
many

many duties, and enforced, as they were able and had opportunity, the obligation to observe them. Yet these proceeded by very gradual advances, taught to be aware, however the mode might excite derision, that "precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little." And it was not 'till, by long experience of the evils arising from sin, men were prepared for admitting the most perfect dispensation, that the name, by which alone they were to be saved, was so made known to them, as to become the guide of life. It was not 'till mankind, being children and servants, had long been "in bondage under the elements of the world," that "the fulness of time arrived," for their "receiving the adoption of sons," and becoming perfect men; and that Christ, though present in the efficacy of his intercession and atonement, became

came "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel."

Now, what it has been the wisdom of God to observe in his government, we might presume, were there no other grounds for the opinion, it would be wise in men to imitate in theirs. Religion and politics differ only, or principally, as they require obedience to different authorities. In the Jewish state, the institutor of religion and of government being the same, even this difference did not take place. We may, therefore, without much danger of error, conclude, that, as the establishment of different religious institutions, considered as the work of providence, was a work of so much time and cautious preparation, in order to their answering the designed effect, the like gradual mode of proceeding is also necessary in political ones; and that the too
hasty

hasty introduction of new principles, however well intended, is injudicious, and cannot reasonably be expected to be productive of good.

IN confirmation of this presumption, we have arguments of reason from the nature of the thing itself, and the more unerring testimony of experience.

I. It has been justly observed, that "the idea of a perfect and immortal commonwealth will always be found as chimerical, as that of a perfect and immortal man *." The excellence of a form of government must, indeed, evidently be determined by the circumstances of the people, for whom it is intended, and by the probability of its being well administered: for though, strictly speaking, it is not to be affirmed, that the form, which is best administered, is best; since

* Hume.

since there may be disadvantages in the form, for which no care in the administration can compensate; and since the form may, on the other hand, be such, as to diminish, in *various degrees*, the danger of maladministration; yet, unless mankind can be supposed to remain in the same state of civilization, it is a great error to imagine, that the same form of government will continue to produce the same effects; or that, independently of the public virtue of those in authority, *any* form can be so administered, as effectually to secure the public good. Men must themselves be machines, or, at least, beings of an unchangeable nature, before the idea can be realized of a form of government, which shall long continue of equal excellence, and which, as by a mechanical operation, shall execute itself. As this, if true, shows, that improvements may be made, and consequently laudably
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attempted, in any particular form of government; so it precludes all attempts to establish a form, which, regardless of existing circumstances, shall adapt itself to the rights of man considered abstractedly, and at once attain to perfection.

It also precludes, what it is more particularly my object to contend against, all attempts at *violent and sudden* alterations. In a community of considerable extent, it is not to be imagined, that any alteration can take place, without affecting the interests of individuals in very *different* and even *opposite* ways. It is well if, in the result, it prove beneficial to *all*; but that it should be so, in the first instance, is impossible. The absolute property of a state cannot, on a sudden, be augmented at pleasure. Whatever advantages, therefore, of this nature are given to one, must be taken

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from

from another. Even the increased liberty of the generality, will operate as a restraint on those, who before had peculiar privileges. Now, it cannot reasonably be expected, that men should have attained to that degree of public spirit, which will incline them to submit, without opposition, to the loss of that, on the possession of which, were it only from the circumstance of their having possessed it, their happiness must greatly depend; not to mention, that, by a very natural effect of self-love, they may easily be led, to think it their *duty* to resist such new distributions, as encroachments on their sacred and inalienable rights. Before men are called upon to part with any thing, which they deem valuable, and to which they have all the claim, that long established laws can give, they ought to be prepared for it by such previous intimations, as may lead them to discover the necessity of making

making such a sacrifice of private to public good; or, which is better, of so regulating their attachments and pursuits, that the good of the public and of themselves may be the same.

II. THE necessity of this precaution has been too frequently evinced by experience.

I. THE reformation of religion in these kingdoms is one of the brightest periods of our history; yet is its brightness tarnished with many spots, which premature haste to accomplish it seems to have occasioned. I refer not to its first beginnings, in the reign of Henry the Eighth; because, as the reformation of religion, though the professed, was probably not the real object in view, it would answer no good purpose, as an exercise of discretion, to investigate the procedure. In those, to whom I would suggest considera-

tions of prudence, I am willing to suppose
 uprightness of intention. If, then, we con-
 template the progress of that great work,
 in the time of the pious Edward, we may
 easily perceive, that many steps were taken,
 which far out-ran the information and sen-
 timents of the people on the subject, and to
 which, consequently, obedience could not
 be obtained, from a conviction of their
 propriety or expedience. The judicious
 Cranmer, indeed, as we are told, "was
 averse to all violent changes, and was de-
 termined to bring over the people, by insen-
 sible innovations, to that system of doctrine
 and discipline, which he esteemed the most
 pure and perfect *." The venerable Ridley
 also was inclined to adopt the like mode-
 rate measures, and they both are said to have
 opposed, as far as they were able, "the ra-
 pine and spoil of the church, which took
 place without law or order †." The gene-
 rality,

* Hume.

† Burnet.

rality, however, of the principal conductors
 proceeded in a very different manner. They
 seem to have thought, that they could not
 differ too soon, or too widely, from every
 thing, of which they at all disapproved.
 This afforded occasion to many, whose least
 concern was really about religion, to join
 themselves to the side of the reformers. For,
 it is to be observed, however pure may be
 the intentions of the *first movers* of a great
 political measure, yet, as it must necessa-
 rily, if conducted by hasty steps, produce a
 convulsion of worldly interests, the ambi-
 tion and rapacity of those, who have any
 hopes of advantage from a change, will na-
 turally be exerted to increase the confusion.
 Be this, however, as it may, the fact, that
 the opinions of the people did not keep
 pace with the instituted alterations, is too
 clear to be controverted. It is asserted by
 one, who had good opportunity of know-
 ing,

ing, that "many of the Bishops, and most of the Clergy, were, all the while, papists in their hearts, and only complied to preserve their benefices*:" and, if such was the case with the teachers, what can we suppose was the case of those, whom they taught? Indeed, so late as at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth, it was observed, as a reason for proceeding with caution, that "the greater part of the people were still attached to the pomp of the old ceremonies†;" a plain indication, that the attempts, which had been made to abolish them, were made too soon. This premature haste to attain perfection, though it did not produce *all* the evils, which might have been expected, yet produced many. Probably, nothing but the the peculiar mildness of the Sovereign's disposition hindered it from giving rise to a very cruel

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* Burnet.

† Burnet's Abridgment of his Hist. of the Reform. 339.

persecution. As it was, instances enough of persecution occurred, greatly to disgrace the cause. By the sudden rejection of restraints to ill conduct, before new principles were properly instilled, "the manners of the people also became extremely corrupt *;" and this, in the succeeding reign, afforded too fair a pretext for the restoration of the old ones. In short, I am disposed to think, that, to this premature haste, by which actual alterations went so far beyond a general conviction of their propriety and expedience, may, in great measure, be attributed that severe check, which the reformation experienced, in the reign of the bigotted Mary: for I cannot imagine, that, even at that period, the will of the Sovereign alone would have been sufficient to re-establish the Romish

* Burnet.—Burnet, in another place, says, "The sins of England did, at this time, call down from heaven curses on the Land."

nish religion, unless the wish of a very considerable part of the people had concurred with it: and, doubtless, one great cause of its being re-established with so many circumstances of cruelty was, the desire of revenge for oppression and indignities received.

LET it not be thought, from these remarks, that I have any design to detract from the just merits of those, who conscientiously engaged in that important business, and who proceeded in it with the necessary prudence. That many were entitled to this praise, I am ready to admit: many, in the prosecution of the best intentions, gave evidences of wisdom and firmness, which cannot but command our admiration; and some, without much exaggeration, might be numbered among martyrs. Some, however, whose intentions

tions I would yet not arraign, impeded, as I have said, the progress of that, which was the object of their care; and made it the occasion of evils, which I cannot conceive to have been altogether unavoidable. It was, indeed, scarce to be expected, that a work of such magnitude and difficulty would be conducted throughout in the best manner *possible*; and the candid, accordingly, in reviewing the conduct of our reformers, will be very cautious in dealing out their censures: yet there certainly is no reason, why we should not, from the failings even of wise and good men, draw those lessons of prudence, which, perhaps, such is the imbecillity of the human understanding, nothing but the experience of ills can teach us. At the accession of the illustrious Elizabeth, this experience, purchased by the errors of her predecessors, if it had not its full effect, was not without considerable use.

“Elizabeth,” says an historian, “though determined in her own mind, resolved to proceed by gradual and secure steps, and not to imitate the example of Mary, in encouraging the bigots of her party to make immediately a violent invasion on the established religion*.” It was one of the two great maxims of her policy, “that consciences were not to be forced by violence, but won and reduced by force of truth, with the aid of time, and all good means of instruction and persuasion†.” This led her to adopt such measures, both against papists and puritans, against those, who were for entirely keeping up the superstitions of the Romish church, and those, who either were disposed to go to the other extreme, or to reach the right point by too rapid steps, as placed the reformation on the firm foundation,

* Hume. † Sir Francis Walsingham's Letter to M. Critoy, recorded in Burnet's Hist. of the Reformation.

tion, on which, without being perfect, it has yet long and happily rested.

2. ANOTHER instance may be found in the part of our history, which has a more immediate relation to this day's solemnity. Although the disastrous contest, of which we are commemorating the happy termination, is not solely to be attributed to demands of liberty, for which the people were not prepared; yet it cannot be denied, that such demands were made; and it is extremely probable, that they not only heightened the asperity of the dispute, but were a bar to such concessions, as might otherwise have been peaceably obtained. On the horrors of the civil war itself, I shall not now expatiate. Let us confine our attention to its consequences. The object of contention, on the side of liberty, seems to have been obtained; for the partizans of liberty

were decidedly victorious. Yet, what were the advantages produced? If there was more liberty, there was, confessedly, less happiness than before. The universal joy, which was displayed, when the prospect of the restoration was first opened, sufficiently evinces, that the nation was in a state of severe suffering. But it should seem, that even *liberty*, as it was enjoyed by the great body of the people, was rather diminished than increased. "No man" it is said, "was so remote from party, so indifferent to public good, as not to feel the most ardent wishes for the dissolution of that tyranny, which was oppressive and ruinous to the nation*." The party most active in the cause of liberty, "sensible, from experience, that their passion for it, however laudable, had carried them into unwarrantable extremes, were desirous of laying aside former jealousies, and of restoring royalty†." As, when David was brought

* Hume.

† Hume.

brought back to his house, after the rebellion of Abfalom, it was matter of strife among his people, who should have the greatest share in bringing him back; so, at the restoration of Charles, all men, in proportion as they were desirous of being thought mindful of the public good, endeavoured to be instrumental in accomplishing it. "The rapidity, with which the events, leading to his restoration, were conducted, was such, as manifested the passionate zeal, and entire unanimity of the nation; insomuch that, as a noble historian expresses it, a man could not but wonder, where those people dwelt, who had kept the king so long from enjoying the obedience of such loyal subjects*." It may, perhaps, be said, that the situation of things under Cromwell was not that, at which any considerable party had aimed; and that, therefore, we are not to wonder at their not being satisfied with

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* Hume, *with alterations.*

it, nor to consider it as the *genuine* fruit of their efforts. But, if that situation was a necessary, or very probable, consequence of their proceedings, in order to attain their aim, whatever it might be, we may equally conclude, that their proceedings were erroneous, and that they had but ill adapted the means to the end.

HERE, then, we see the over-zealous friends of freedom so falling short of their expectations, as to own their disappointment by the most humiliating confession, an endeavour to get back to the point, from which they first set out. For, whatever advantages to the cause of liberty might eventually result from the contention, which had taken place, they certainly were not provided for, at the time of the restoration. "The parliament discovered a more anxious care to guard against rebellion in the subject,

ject, than against encroachments in the crown; and a statute was, accordingly, passed, of which the terms, taken in their literal sense, imply a total renunciation of all limitations to monarchy, and of all privileges in the subject, independent of the will of the sovereign*." This, therefore, leads us to a discovery of the ill consequences, which we may reasonably apprehend from such exertions in favour of liberty, as I am condemning, even if they do not produce the *worst*. By giving men a bias to the contrary extreme, they endanger that portion of liberty, which the subject has already in possession; and it may, I think, be truly said, that the want of those restraints to despotism, which, at the restoration, this bias alone hindered from being placed, gave occasion, in a subsequent reign, to that extension of the prerogative, which

* Hume.

which had well-nigh again involved the nation in the calamities of civil war.

3. As the contemplation of recent distress must necessarily excite painful sensations, I would not willingly direct your attention to the events, which have occurred among a neighbouring people, if it were possible, in considering the subject before us, to keep the mind from adverting to them. They have furnished an additional instance of the ill policy of those, who, by aiming at more than is practicable in existing circumstances, hinder that from being accomplished which is really beneficial. The French, indeed, in the paroxysms of party rage, have sometimes aimed at that, which could not be beneficial in *any* circumstances; as they certainly, in the pursuit of their ends, whatever they might be, have often employed means, which no pretences could justify

justify: and it may, perhaps, be thought an offence against propriety, to consider either of these as mere deviations from the principles, I am recommending; to dignify, with the name of politicians, either those, who aim at what is clearly detrimental, or who, to accomplish any purpose of good, appeal to "the madness of the people." Since, however, these have been the *actual* consequences of proceedings, which were once allowed the praise of patriotism, it becomes important to inquire, how far they are the *natural* and *necessary* consequences; how much of the mischief of the flood is imputable to those, who first let out the water: for it ought, undoubtedly, to be matter of nice calculation to all the well-disposed, who shall hereafter aim at reformation, to determine the probability of being joined by such abettors, as will infallibly frustrate their designs. The kindness of Providence is ever watchful

to bring good out of evil, and we may charitably hope, that the French will yet, ere long, obtain a constitution, which will ensure both their own happiness, and (with respect to *them*) the safety of their neighbours; but, certainly, the happiness of many years will not be sufficient to wipe away the tears, which ought to flow, for the miseries endured. The particular errors, into which they have fallen, it is not my province to investigate; and it would, perhaps, be presumptuous in any one, not intimately acquainted with the circumstances, in which they were previously placed, to attempt it: yet there seems sufficient reason, from events, to believe, that they are not yet arrived at that period of improvement, when they can safely dispense, I do not say with a monarchy, but with a form of government having all the strength of a monarchy, and that not very much limited by restrictions.

FROM

FROM what has been said, it will, I hope, appear, that as, in general, in deciding on political questions, there is great room for the exercise of judgment; so, there are none so likely to injure the cause of liberty as those, who, without any regard to circumstances, seek to extend it. To the different ages of a community, as it advances in intellectual and moral growth, very different portions of liberty may safely be entrusted. The advocates of liberty, however, if they are actuated by the desire of promoting human happiness, will at least be as cautious of extending its limits too wide, as they are zealous in preventing others from keeping them too narrow. They will not wait to be instructed by the terrible experience of civil commotion, that men, not restrained by the principles of reason or religion, are prepared to make no other use of their liberty, than as a "cloke of wickedness."

It is, perhaps, barely possible exactly to determine the portion of liberty, best adapted to any particular degree of improvement; since this would be to attain all the perfection, of which policy is capable: but it is something, to be aware, that it is an inquiry, which demands consideration, and that useful liberty is not promoted by *every* removal of restraint.

WITH respect, for instance, to the privilege of universal suffrage, in the choice of representatives, however valuable it may be deemed, as an *exercise*, a *security*, or a *token* of liberty, it evidently cannot be proper, if it were practicable, in *all* periods of civilization. It can, indeed, be defended only on the supposition, not likely to be realized, that every man is equally qualified to discharge the duty, which would thus be imposed on him. It
must

must necessarily happen, that, in those situations of a society, in which most depended on the wisdom of governors, there would be the least chance of their being wisely chosen; for certainly those, who stand in most need of restraint, are least likely to be disposed to seek it, and least able to determine what degree of it will be salutary.

LET him, then, who is solicitous for the increase of liberty in the world, seriously consider, not what may seem most desirable in an abstract view, but what the actual state of the society, of which he is desirous to become a benefactor, will admit of with most advantage; and, if the portion should prove too small to correspond with the ardour of his wishes, let him rather employ his exertions among the people, in enabling them to bear more,
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than in pursuing measures to give them more, before they can safely bear it. Instead of inviting them to the discussion of questions, of which they must necessarily, without previous preparation, be incompetent judges, and, by encouraging them to form a rule of conduct from the decision, subjecting them to the hazard of fatal *misconduct*; let him instruct them in those great duties of morality, to the performance of which, as men and members of a community, they are plainly bound, and from the obligation of which they cannot lightly be set free. Instead of giving them a partial view of any particular constitution, by exaggerating its evils, or denying its blessings, thus generating a discontent, which no conceivable alterations can remove; let him put them in remembrance, that, as no work of man can be perfect, so is perfection less to be expected, where the co-operation of

many

many is required; and that, if the idea of a perfect government could be realized, many evils of social life would still remain. Let him, in particular, teach them the necessity of a chearful submission to that system of subordination, which must have place in every government, and which seems, indeed, the designation of Providence, and a patient endurance of those evils, which, under every possible regulation, are the unavoidable lot of man. In short, instead of addressing to them discourses, or distributing among them writings, of a *merely political* nature, more calculated to point out to them the failure of duty in others, than to instruct them in their own; let him, pursuing the judicious plan, suggested lately by a lady of distinguished piety and talents*, employ his exertions for their improvement, in the dispersion of publications

* Miss Hannah More.

tions, which inculcate the *general principles of reason and religion*; and by which, while they are prepared for a higher state of social life, they may be assisted in obtaining the dispositions, so necessary to the enjoyment of happiness in any.

Now, to God, &c.



A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

OCTOBER 25, 1795.

THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS MAJESTY'S
ACCESSION TO THE THRONE.

By EDWARD PEARSON, B.D.

FELLOW OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.



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TO
THOMAS LACY DICKONSON, Esq.

OF SHEPRETH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE,

WHOM THE AUTHOR CONSIDERS AS A
TRUE PATRIOT,

THIS SERMON

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WITH SENTIMENTS OF RESPECT

AND ESTEEM,

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A
S E R M O N, &c.

PROVERBS XXIX. 2.

WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN AUTHORITY,
THE PEOPLE REJOICE.

AS the welfare of nations depends on the degree, in which virtue and piety prevail in them, it is obvious, that it must be materially affected by the manners of those in high stations, and particularly of those, who have the regulation of such motives to action, as operate most forcibly on the human mind. The case, doubtless, in which the personal character

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of a ruler is of most concern is, where all things are directed solely by his will. The people are happy or miserable, at least to a considerable extent, according as a Titus or a Domitian is seated on the throne. We are, however, now called upon to express our grateful acknowledgments to that Providence, which, in the person of our gracious Sovereign, whose accession to the throne we are met to celebrate, has given us an experimental proof, how important the character of a Monarch is to the welfare of his subjects, though he may reign under many limitations. It is evident, indeed, since the bulk of mankind are actuated by motives of immediate self-interest, that he, who has considerable influence in the enacting of laws, and still more in putting them into execution; who has the disposal of honours and preferments; and who can, in a great degree, give

give the sanction of fashion to this or that mode of moral behaviour, will greatly contribute, whether he has the direct intention of doing so or not, to make that behaviour prevail, which is the distinguishing mark of his own character. As the most likely method of recommending ourselves to the favour of another is, to imitate his example, we are naturally led to a very diligent imitation of those, by whom our happiness can most materially be affected.

It may, however, reasonably be expected, that a Monarch, who is himself virtuous, will be zealous for the prevalence of virtue; and his zeal will naturally lead him to exert the means to promote it, with which his exalted situation so amply furnishes him. He will countenance those only, or at least no further than circum-

stances may compel him, who have the same virtuous dispositions and habits with himself. He will be careful, that all the departments, to which he has the immediate appointment, be filled with men of integrity, and, as far as he can judge, of such endowments, as may enable them to discharge their several duties with the proper effect. And it will easily be conceived, since these may reasonably be supposed to act, in a considerable degree, by the same principles, that this will go far to place men of the same character in all the subordinate situations of authority.

WHEN his attention is called to the confirmation of new laws, or to the administration of those already established, he will not be guided by considerations inferior to those, for which his high office was instituted. He will not, on the pre-
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tence of state necessity, or for the sake of present convenience, promote any laws, contrary to the interests of virtue, or detrimental, in any other respect, to the general and permanent welfare of his people. He will not, to gratify any purpose of revenge or advantage to himself, or at the interested intercession of others, either punish the innocent, or screen the guilty; but, considering himself the minister of that Being, who instituted human government for this very end, that it might be "for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well," he will impartially render justice to all, according to his opinion of their several deserts.

It is with great reason, that we this day offer up our thanksgivings to that Providence, which has, for many years,
indulged

indulged us with a King to reign over us, who, by the purity of his own example, the encouragement he has afforded to men of virtue and talents, and particularly by the impartial administration of justice, has made the advantage of a righteous ruler very sensibly experienced. As, by the nature of our government, this is an advantage, which it was not in our power to command, it becomes us to be the more thankful for its enjoyment; and we have only, on this head, to wish, that the want in many of a due sense of such an important blessing, may not call down upon us all the unhappiness of being deprived of it.

THERE is another branch of our governors, for whom also, as we have not the opportunity of selecting them, we can only be thankful, when they are such as they ought to be, and lament the misfortune,

tune, when they happen to be otherwise. It will not fail, however, to have a favourable effect on the conduct of all, who are in stations of rank and authority, or who are desirous of being advanced to them, that he, who is entrusted with the power of conferring or improving them, is a lover of virtue. When the fountain of honour is pure, the streams, which flow from it, may reasonably be expected to be so too; and we may confidently hope, that one of the strongest incentives to actions beneficial to the public, which the careful father of his people can bestow, will not be perverted by him to their detriment. With respect to those, who have attained to such distinctions, and to the right of transmitting them to their descendants, there is an evident obligation, thence arising, to make use of all the means in their power, as well by the
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aids of a suitable education as otherwise, by which they may be enabled to transmit to their children, together with the privileges of birth, the dispositions and habits adapted so to enjoy them, as may render them beneficial to the public, and truly honourable to their possessors.

BUT, by the constitution, under which we have the happiness to live, the benefits of our political situation are not left entirely to depend on the character of our king or our nobles. A very important part of our legislative body consists of those, who are the objects of our own choice; and who, therefore, if they correspond not to the character of righteous rulers, are a cause of reproach to us, as well as of lamentation. If our King be of a weak or depraved disposition, and, losing sight of that true glory, which can arise only from
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the grateful applauses of a people rendered happy by his sway, aim at the mere enlargement of his dominions, or the extension of his prerogative over them; and seek, from mean ambition, to become the admired, though hated, hero of history: or, if our nobility, forsaking the principle, on which their order was established, cease to be examples of talents exerted in the service of the public; and, endeavouring to be distinguished only by refinements in dissipation; employ the influence, which their wealth and situation give them, in the gratification of selfish desires, and to purposes of public mischief: we must then patiently bear the misfortune, consoling ourselves with reflecting on the other parts of that constitution, which, notwithstanding its being subject to such occasional impediments to the attainment of its

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object,

object, is yet admirably adapted, on the whole, to ensure the public good. But if in those, who are the chosen representatives of the people, there be any egregious defect of moral or political principle, a defect of any of the qualities requisite to fit them for their situation, the people ought to take the blame of it, in a considerable degree, to themselves. Although the privilege of electing our representatives is very unequally distributed, it is yet sufficiently general to make it matter of serious lamentation if, as is the opinion of some, there be such a want of public spirit in the exercise of it, as, from the circumstance of the privilege itself not being still more general, can be attended with any very mischievous consequences. The number of electors is already so great, that to those, who are inclined to judge favourably of mankind,

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it is not easy to conceive what purposes of wisdom or integrity could be answered by the mere increase of it. Be this, however, as it may, it is my present object, taking things as they actually are, to point out the conduct, which seems adapted to produce the greatest good ; to recommend the right employment of the privileges we possess already, rather than excite to a vain and perhaps useless aspiration after more. If the state of our representation be less perfect than might be wished, this will not excuse us from doing what is in our power, and what therefore is our duty, to secure to the public all the advantages, which the representative part of our government has in view ; but will rather oblige us to make amends, by the more scrupulous discharge of individual duty, for the necessary imperfection of general regulations.

LET every one, then, who is possessed of the right of contributing to the choice of a representative of the people in parliament, regard it, not as a private privilege, of which he is at liberty to make the most advantage for himself, but as a sacred trust, by which he is constituted a guardian of the public good; and, regarding it in this view, let him not be driven, by any consideration, from such an exercise of it, as his conscience will naturally dictate. We have an important duty to perform, when it depends in any measure on our conduct, whether virtue or vice shall have the encouragement of the legislature. While the representatives of the people are men of sense and integrity, and are preferred for being so, from a regard to public good, we may reasonably hope, that they will endeavour to accomplish the purposes of those, who preferred them ;

them; that such encouragement will be given to virtuous conduct, both by the laws, and the example of those who enact them, as may make the cause of virtue flourish: but, if they be elected on considerations foreign, and even contrary to those, which alone can render them worthy of our choice, it is not to be expected, that, when they come to act, they will be directed by better principles. If the first movements of political measures originate in corruption, it can scarce happen, that the conclusions will be sound. Yet when, at any time, a senator is suspected of disregarding the public good, from motives of immediate self-interest, all feel indignant at his conduct, and those perhaps the most, who have evinced the least public spirit in electing him; forgetting that, in their own conduct, they have furnished him with a plea for his, which,

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at least to such as have set the example of corruption, ought to go far in his excuse.

If it be urged, that, in the great number of those, who are possessed of the same privilege, the vote of an individual is of little moment, and that he may well be excused for acting on views of immediate advantage to himself, as being the preponderant duty, let him consider what must be the consequence if all, who might allege the same reason, were to follow his example; not to mention, that he could enjoy, surely, with but imperfect satisfaction, the benefits, which he possesses only at others cost. The prevalence of virtue, however, is of such importance to every member of the state, that even the principle of self-interest is departed from, when the incentives to virtue are voluntarily given

given up or weakened. He who, by the prostitution of his suffrage, contributes to lessen the wisdom and probity of the counsels, to which virtue looks for her support, will be poorly compensated for the hazard of those evils, to which he exposes himself and his connections, by any immediate reward he may receive.

WHEN the temptation to convert our privilege of voting to selfish purposes is once surmounted, there will remain no difficulty in the discharge of our duty, which may not easily be removed. Using the same degree of caution, which we should think necessary in a private concern of equal import, we shall be in little danger of doing wrong. The characters of those, who are likely, or indeed qualified, to be offered to our choice, are generally so well known, that scarce any one, who
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is not willing, can be materially deceived respecting them ; and the grounds of preference, if we would prefer according to the criterion I am recommending, are so plain, that few can err in applying them. We have only to recollect the advice of Jethro to Moses, “ to choose out of all the people, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness ;” and, being sincerely desirous of following it, we shall be in no great danger of deviating far from it.

BUT it sometimes happens, from the supposed necessity of co-operating with a party, that even those, who act on the best motives, give a vote, or support a particular measure, in direct opposition to their own opinion. I will not undertake to say, that this conduct never can be right ; yet, as the principle it proceeds on
is

is so liable to abuse, I should be sorry to find, that it is often necessary. It is, indeed, possible that, on some great emergency, a combination of persons of ability and integrity, in counter-acting a powerful and over-bearing influence, may, at its first institution, be of public benefit; but no such combination is likely long to act on the principles, on which it set out. It will necessarily happen, that the vigilance of the generality will soon abate; and the probable consequence is, that the effect of their operations will be employed, by a few ambitious individuals, to the purpose of their own aggrandisement. If, therefore, we are, at any time, induced to join ourselves to a party, by which we imagine some measure of public good may most effectually be accomplished, let us carefully guard against that change of object, which is so likely to take place, and give our

C sanction

sanction to what is proposed to our support with the same scrupulosity, as if it were entirely our own, and we were singly responsible for the issue. If, by such information as we are able to obtain, we do not find ourselves competent to a decision on the question, which we are called upon to decide, let us rather not speak at all, than give up the influence of our voice into such hands, as may direct it wrong. Indeed, whatever is the nature of the duty, let a man act according to his judgment, in his individual capacity, and the result, if not the best possible, will at least be such, as need occasion him no remorse: whereas, if he has given up himself to the disposal of others, and they happen to dispose of him rightly, making him an instrument of good, he can derive but little satisfaction from the circumstance; though, if they make him the instrument

ment of harm, he will not easily forgive himself*.

LET

* It has often appeared to me as the great misfortune of modern politics, that there is an allowed necessity of *Party*, to the bringing about of any measure of public utility. While this notion prevails, I have no sanguine hope of the existence of much public wisdom or public virtue, nor consequently of the greatest public good; though, by the collision of different interests, particular beneficial measures may sometimes be effected.

By *public wisdom*, I mean the judgment formed (or the capacity to form it) on any measure, from the views in which it appears to a great variety of individuals, of different capacities and habits, by which it may be so modified, as to produce the most possible advantage to the whole community. Now this effect can be attained, only by the immediate exercise of the judgment of individuals on the measure to be considered. If individuals *entirely* give up their judgment to the heads of their party, their wisdom, as a public body, exists no longer; and it is *diminished* in the exact proportion, in which they do give it up to them. In large communities, there is, indeed, a necessity, previously to actual operation, for the gradual resignation of private judgment, and trusting to the judgment of others, till the efficient persons are reduced to a number proper for action; but, as this reduction cannot be carried beyond the necessary limits, without manifest disadvantage, it is the part of true policy to be on its guard against a system, which has a direct tendency to carry it on.

LET it not be thought, from what has been said, that I intend to censure the conduct of any individual, whom I may imagine to act inconsistently with the principle,

With respect to *public virtue*, the case is, perhaps, still more evident. If a man acts, in all instances, according to his judgment of the matter, as he cannot be depended on to act by the spirit of any party, he is worth nothing to any, and probably no temptation to act, in any *particular* instance, otherwise than his judgment may direct, will be held out to him, nothing less than a *course* of conduct being of much consideration either way; but, if it be known, that he is ready to support the minister in any measure, or to oppose him in any, it then becomes worth while to secure him where he is, or bring him over to where he is not. If, therefore, I undertook to counsel him, who wishes to derive the most private advantage from his public privileges, I would say to him, "By all means, attach yourself decidedly to a party. Perhaps it matters not a great deal to which. It may, indeed, be a longer or shorter time before it answers to you; but you will be very much out of luck if, in the frequent changes, which take place, it does not answer to you in the end." With respect to the party itself, as it must necessarily happen, that *one*, or however a *few*, will soon obtain the ascendancy, and have the direction of its influence, the danger of their directing it by personal considerations will be still greater. If we find not public virtue in him, who has but an individual voice, what reason have we to expect it in those, who can command the voice of thousands, and who, in consequence of their increased importance,

principle, which I have endeavoured to establish. In the complicated mazes of policy, it is possible, that some may see the matter in a light rather different from that, in which it appears right to me to place it; and, in the interference of duties, which sometimes takes place, it is not improbable, that many, who see it in the same, may have reasons, which, at least to themselves, will justify their neglect of an acknowledged obligation. It is my part, however, simply to trace out the rule of duty, whatever exceptions it may admit of, and whether any may think fit to be directed by it or not. Leaving, then, the claim

importance, are subjected to a proportionably greater temptation to depart from the conscientious application of it. If it be said, "That those, who are at the head of a party, are therefore placed there, because they are distinguished from the rest by a greater portion of public virtue;" I will leave it to be decided, by what experience has taught us, whether this, admitting it to be true, be a sufficient counter-balance to the increased cause of defection now suggested.

claim to an exemption from its observance to be determined by each one's conscience, I will only say, with respect to any deviation from it, that "happy is he, who condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth."

The principle, which should regulate our conduct in the choice of representatives in parliament, ought also to be attended to, in a degree proportionate to the importance of the case, in the choice of every subordinate ruler or officer. The magistrates of every description have it greatly in their power, by their fidelity and diligence in the administration of the laws, and still more perhaps by the influence of a good example, to promote the cause of virtue and religion. As, by the several gradations of their ranks, they are connected, and in a manner associated,
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with the different classes of the people, they have the opportunity of an immediate intercourse with each of them ; an advantage, which the supreme Magistrate of a great nation, or indeed the members of the legislature in general, if they possess it at all, must possess in a much inferior degree ; and it highly concerns us to take care, that this advantage, by being placed in proper hands, be duly improved. Whoever, therefore, is called upon to the performance of a duty, on which so much depends, as on the choice of those, who have such an influence on the public welfare, should consider, as I have already observed with respect to the higher case, that he is called upon, not to exercise a mere personal privilege, but to execute a public trust ; and that he is not at liberty, from the solicitation of friends, or the expectation of reward, to confer his
suffrage

suffrage on any candidate, whom he does not judge well qualified to fulfil the duties of the station, in which he contributes to place him.

BEFORE I conclude, let me be permitted to remark, that, if we are resolved to perform our duties of this kind on the principle, which I have recommended, it is a necessary preliminary, that we do not entangle ourselves by premature engagements. 'Till the moment arrive, at which our choice is to be declared, we cannot possibly know, on whom it may most worthily fall. Regard to a previous promise will not fail to prejudice us with respect to the merits of the several candidates, if it does not induce us to prefer him, whom we do not think the most deserving ; and if, in judging between contending obligations, we at length determine

termine rightly, we shall at least have encountered a difficulty, we might easily have avoided, as well as incurred the hazard of giving needless offence. Indeed, he who engages himself to perform any duty in a particular manner, before he is fully acquainted with the circumstances, under which he shall be called upon to do it, must give up every pretension to the *conscientious* performance of it, which necessarily implies all the attention to those circumstances, it is in our power to bestow. If, therefore, we would lay claim to it in this instance, we must not, to get rid of troublesome importunity, or to obtain any positive advantage, give to any one an unconditional promise of our support.

Finally: whatever may be the situation of public affairs; whether Providence may please to bless us with prosperity, or see fit

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to

to try us by adversity, let us, by the observance of our own political duties, in our several stations, take diligent heed, that we have no just cause of self-reproach; and particularly, by attending to the duties now set forth, let us make use of the means in our power, by which we may secure to ourselves the happiness of being governed by righteous rulers, and have reason to praise God, not only that our King, but all who are invested with authority under him, remembering the end of their appointment, and the account which they must one day give, "do truly and indifferently minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of true religion and virtue."



*The disposition, requisite to an inquiry into
the truth of Christianity,*



A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

APRIL, 24, 1796.

BY EDWARD PEARSON, B. D.

FELLOW OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE.



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